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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000246

SIPDIS SIPDIS  
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG  
AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PASS TO AMEMBASSY PODGORICA  
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [TX](#) [UZ](#)  
SUBJECT: Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan Rediscover Friendship of Peoples

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CLASSIFIED BY: Nicholas Berliner, Pol-Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: The Uzbeks pulled out all the stops for the February 24-25 visit of Turkmen President Berdymuhamedov to Tashkent, evidence that these two countries are rapidly developing a "special relationship." In addition to cultural and historical ties, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have common interests in trans-boundary water issues and are key suppliers of natural gas to Russia. The Uzbeks increasingly resent Russian behavior that pits the Central Asian states against one another, particularly on the issue of water. Closer relations with Ashgabat are one way for Tashkent to counteract this dynamic. End Summary.

Brotherly Love in Tashkent

12. (C) A cavalcade of concerts, receptions, the opening of an ornate new embassy, and a state dinner in which Karimov waxed eloquent about the warm feelings between the two countries and their leaders, suggested that a real bond is developing between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It was significant that Karimov used his press conference with the Turkmen to publicly endorse Uzbek participation in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), and perhaps over time the Uzbeks will try to nudge the Turkmen in the direction of permitting "positive neutrality" to include rail shipments of goods for our troops in Afghanistan. As Central Asian countries appear to edge a bit closer to each other in recent weeks in response to the distrust sown by Russia's mischief on water and related issues, the Uzbek-Turkmen relationship seems to be growing stronger and could eventually play an important regional role. A slick exhibition of Turkmen commercial products and services, and intensive media coverage, rounded out a truly extraordinary few days of focus on the Uzbek-Turkmen relationship. Uzbekistan does not have many, if any, friends in the world; this relationship may be one of the few to fall into that category.

Common Interests

13. (C) Uzbek Foreign Minister Norov noted in a Feb. 27 meeting with the Ambassador that Turkmen President Berdymuhamedov sees common interests with Uzbekistan. He said that Russia wants Central Asia divided to maximize its own influence, but that Uzbekistan will take the lead in resisting these efforts. Turkmen Ambassador Soltan Pirmukhamedov confirmed to the Ambassador Feb. 26 that the visit had deepened the bilateral relationship in significant ways. The two sides share a common approach on the key issue of water management in the region -- an approach that endorses the Uzbek position that controversial hydro-electric projects that could cede control of water to upstream countries should not proceed without the agreement of all affected parties. (The Uzbeks apparently own, and depend on, several pumping stations in Turkmenistan that deliver water from the Amudarya River to Uzbekistan, but the understanding on water issues extends to the broader region as well, including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.) The Turkmen Ambassador said there was nothing new in his country's position on shipment of goods to Afghanistan: Turkmenistan would ship only "humanitarian" supplies, consistent with its policy of "positive neutrality" (when the Ambassador asked between which parties Turkmenistan considered itself to be neutral, Amb. Pirmukhamedov merely smiled and reiterated the policy). He said natural gas had been discussed but nothing new was decided: commitments to ship gas to China and Russia remained in place. He described plans to create a "free trade zone" between the two countries, but did not provide details (the chairman of Uzbekistan's foreign relations committee told the Ambassador that this might just amount to legalizing the active smuggling that goes on over the border involving the sale of dirt cheap Turkmen gasoline inside Uzbekistan, where prices are much higher). The Turkmen said eight documents had been signed.

Comment

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14. (C) The Turkmen-Uzbek relationship bears watching. From Tashkent's perspective, relations with Turkmenistan are the least fraught, as Ashgabat does not claim a regional leadership role, seems unlikely to succumb to a "color revolution", and does not threaten to take control over upstream water resources. As major natural gas suppliers, closer relations could also enable both

governments to drive harder bargains with Moscow and temper the  
latter's ability sow discord between the states of Central Asia.  
BUTCHER

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL [http://repository.state.sgov.gov/\\_layouts/OSS\\_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:43afa37a-6a39-4a1b-b3](http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:43afa37a-6a39-4a1b-b3)